

SYMPORIUM

POSITION AVAILABLE

WED. May 15, 6:30 PM
at The Cooper Union, Hewitt Building #207,
Third Avenue at 7th street.

\$6 General Admission
\$3 Storefront members, students, seniors

Adriaan Geuze
landscape architect, Rotterdam, Holland

Linda Pollak
architect, New York and Cambridge, MA with a focus on
urban outdoor spaces.

Anne Pasternak
Executive Director of Creative Time, Inc., sponsoring
artists' projects in the urban environment.

Danny Tisdale
artist involved with community planning, legislation and
activists in New York, working to involve artists in
decision-making and City planning.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACING URBAN CENTERS AND THEIR PUBLIC SPACES IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY? AS THE WORLD POPULATION HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY MOBILE, WITH WAVES OF IMMIGRATION SHAPING NEIGHBORHOODS AND THE CITIES BEYOND. ACCOMMODATING CONTINUALLY SHIFTING CULTURAL PREFERENCES AND CONSTRUCTIONS DEMANDS A SIMILAR FLUIDITY. IN AN ERA WHEN MEDIA IMAGES CAN WIELD INFLUENCE BEYOND THE CONTINES OF THE HEADQUARTERS, CITY HALL OR TOWN SQUARE THAT SENDS THEM, HOW CAN WE CONSTRUCT, FACILITATE AND ENCOURAGE PUBLIC SPACES THAT ARE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ANSWER THE NEEDS OF THE CITY TODAY AND TOMORROW? HOW HAVE THE QUESTIONS AFFECTING THE RELATIONSHIP OF NATURE TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OR THE ROLE OF ART IN PUBLIC BEEN ANSWERED, IGNORED OR EXACERBATED BY PAST ACTION? HOW CAN WE BEST ACT, DESIGN, BUILD, THINK PRO-ACTIVELY?

DISCUSSION

Friday, May 17 at 7pm

Bart Lootsma
at Storefront for Art and Architecture

\$6 General Admission
\$3 Storefront members, students, seniors

Dutch architectural critic Bart Lootsma will discuss Contemporary Dutch Landscape/Architecture, particularly related to the exhibition of West 8/Adriaan Geuze's work.



Landscape Design for Eastern Scheldt Storm Surge Barrier, Design 1990, Construction 1991-92

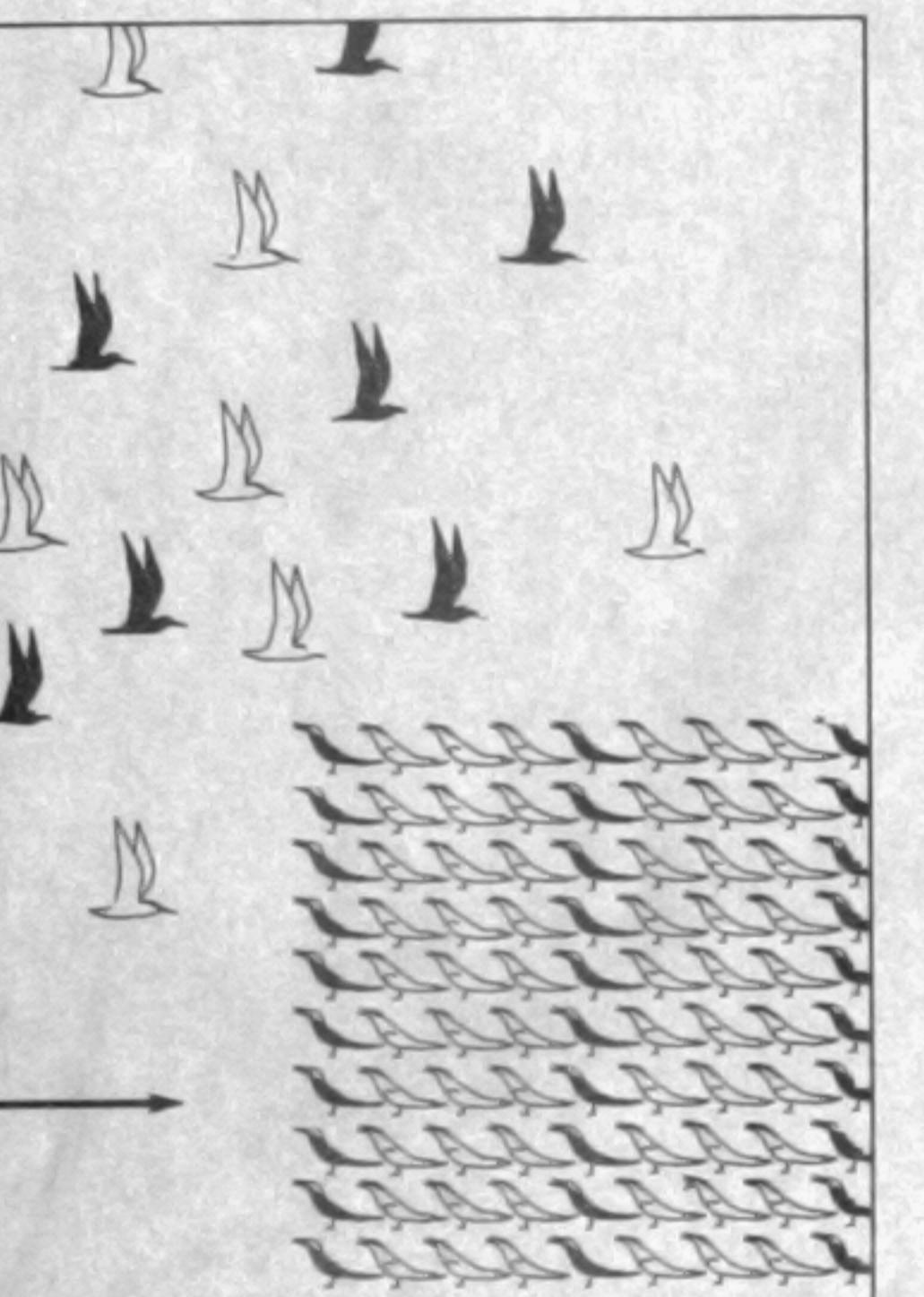
DESIGN COMPETITION

Petrosino Park Redevelopment Design Competition

Jury
Adrian Benepe
Chris Crowley
Rosalyn Deutsche
Paul Friedberg
Mary Miss
Michael Sorkin
Billie Tsien
Cooje van Bruggen
James Wines
Krzysztof Wodiczko

For a prospectus and application, please send us your name & address to (by mail or fax): Petrosino Park Redevelopment Design Competition, Storefront for Art & Architecture, 97 Kenmare Street, New York, NY 10012

Registration Deadline: July 1, 1996
Submissions due: September 3, 1996



ECO-TEC INTERNATIONAL

Eco-Tec International Forum 4 part II

Moriglia on the Cap Corse, Corsica, France
July 15-20, 1996

Forum on the methodology for a Research and Development Center for Environmental Art and Architecture, together with 1996 case study, "The Revitalization of Canari Asbestos Factory." Includes presentations, discussions and workshops with the following participants:

Alan Baker Island
Mel Chin artist
Peter Lang architect/author
Niels Lutzen landscape architect
Tom Meredith social geographer
Kyong Park semi-architect
Yves Nacher Institut Francais d'Architecture
Shirin Neshat artist
Guy Paradis botanist (IDEC/Environmental Office of Corsica)
Yves Paquette INERIS (National Institute for the Environment and Technological Risk)
CRITT (Regional Direction for the Environment of France)
DIREN (Regional Direction for Industry, Research and the Environment)
DRIRE (Regional Direction for Industry, Research and the Environment)

For inquiries, please contact (by mail or fax): Americo Marras, ECO-TEC Project Director, Storefront for Art & Architecture, 97 Kenmare Street, New York, NY 10012

ECO-TEC has been sponsored in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts/International Programs.

VERTICAL LANDSCAPE, GREEN MANHATTANISM

We heard about this vertical city.
We've seen the images of its skyscrapers and expected, in this sublime statement of towering ambition, astonishing pieces of vertical landscapes—parks as ambitious as Rockefeller Center, or the Chrysler and the Empire State Buildings.

When we first discovered Central Park, we saw it as the perfect void, a one hundred fifty block-size, sharply enclosed landscape that provokes the Manhattan skyline and drains the city of its desire for body exposure.

We noted the IBM's bamboo garden, Trump Tower's atrium and waterfall, and the RCA Building's seasonless roof-green, as interesting attempts to deal with the illusion of Babylon's hanging gardens. Manhattan "green" turn out to be an ugly, pathetic flowerpot-green. Even worse, Manhattan is an urban jungle, but green is no part of it. Urban nature bores us with its lack of ambition, silently growing in left-over spaces without the hypnotizing color, the dramatic change of seasons and the overwhelming beauty characteristic of nature.

Yet still, we keep our infant dreams of skygardens and vertical parks.

We envision the following for Manhattan:

**Sky-garden ses back Mies
The Flat iron (sequoia) twin
An inverted 24-hour nature
Ivy unlimited**

This exhibition has been made possible through the generous support of
Stimuleringsfonds voor Architectuur and Consulate General of the Netherlands [New York]

Adriaan Geuze
Edzo Bindels
Jeroen Musch
Henri Borduin
Joost de Natris
Judith Hopfengartner
Marc McCarthy
Cyrus Brent Clark
Catja Edens

WEST 8

May 16 - June 29 1996
opening reception: may 16, 6-8pm
gallery hours: tues-sat 11-6pm

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16 may - 29 june 1996

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ART AND ARCHITECTURE
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Designing For the New Communities



VAMS Terminal. Prix de Rome, 1990



VAMS Terminal. Prix de Rome, 1990

It is often so that innovations within a cultural discipline originate with people who come from outside that discipline. Such is the case with West 8, an office for landscape architecture which in addition to the garden, park and landscape commissions normally assigned such practices, is engaged in designing urban space and drawing up urban plans. There is nothing strange about this, and nothing new either. Landscape architects in the Netherlands have been intensively occupied with designing urban extensions, and building whole new cities and villages in the polders at least since the Second World War. What is new, though, is West 8's concept of landscape as not just being the counter-form of the city but the entire urban-rural constellation to its users. Adrian Geuze puts it, "the new city is an all-wired metropolis of villages, urban centers, suburbs, industrial areas, docks, airfields, woods, lakes, beaches, reserves and the monocultures of hi-tech farming."

While West 8 has taken the stage as a young new office, the Dutch landscape as the reference and source of urban changes has dramatically changed. The landscape of this country has rapidly become urbanized since the World War II, and such urbanization will continue in the years to come. More than seventy per cent of the Dutch built environment was built since 1945, and the population density in the Benelux countries is now approaching that of Japan. So the task now is no longer designing on the virgin tabula rasa of polderland sites or the seemingly unbound countryside that surrounded the traditional city centers, but now in the residual margins between city and green areas, industrial and abandoned sites. It is a landscape, until recently called as periphery, which has now become so extended to make the old city cores peripheral. The Dutch practice of regional and national planning—a system of decentralization—is thus bright face to face with its own limitations, although this state of affairs has long been kept hidden. Even today the rational layout of the Dutch landscape never fails to impact on those flying in to Schiphol Airport from abroad, which is placed to serve many cities and not just one. But already in the Sixties, many vague and less desolate activities were being concentrated provisionally at the city edges. In the beginning, with their numbers being limited, the situation was tolerated. But since then these amorphous fringe areas between cities have been gradually closing ranks to form a patchwork of enclaves, accommodating the most disparate of functions today.

Adrian Geuze was fascinated by the surrealistic nature of this landscape from early on. In 1987, for instance, he wrote about the cemetery as an "urban fringe phenomenon on the same footing in society as vegetable gardens, breaker's yards and gypsy encampments, and above all the analogy between graves and tattered vegetable beds, mortal remains and wrecks of cars, corpses and social outcasts."² However, the ultimate concentrations of what Geuze describes is found on the Maasvlakte, near Rotterdam. Here in this gigantic offshore dockland area an impressive assembly of oil tanks has taken up residence: a twenty-five meter high artificial dune land to hide the oil drums from the beach at the Hook, a uranium waste terminal, a dozen experimental wind turbines, a tidal gully with port dredging depot, a chemical waste dump, a container terminal, a detonation zone for explosives, even a trout farm. The most bizarre program, however, is the World Disaster Centre, an area where fake blocks of flats, an oil platform, a train, trucks, a refinery storage tanks and such like are built and set on fire with natural gas. Firemen and disaster teams from all over the world come to train here twenty-four hours a day.³ But that's not all. On the days off, hordes of people stream to the Massvlakte to engage in new, adventurous and sometimes dangerous forms of recreation, that the designers of parks and leisure areas never even dreamed of and consequently made no place for them in their designs: "They see the expanse of sand as a place to practice sledging or scrambling, the dredging depot as a hang glider runway, the wall of blocks as fossilized rock, the saltwater sand reclamation pit as a place for deep sea diving."⁴ And then he is forgetting the Massvlakte as the venue for the largest house party ever held. The last few years have seen the mechanisms that facilitated the large-scale infrastructure works, land reclamation and urban planning of the postwar reconstruction, grind to a halt. Moreover, the contours of a second and far more radical cultural volte-face are taking shape. The ambition here in the Netherlands is to erect some 800,000 houses by the year 2005, most of them in the Randstad—conurbation defined by Rotterdam, The Hague, Amsterdam and Utrecht. These houses are to be built almost entirely without

such "exalted" matters. The practice chose instead to show the absolute cross-section of housing stock in a systematic photo documentary of 120 suburban residential estates from all over the Netherlands.⁵ There was, in addition, a gigantic model of the 800,000 single-family dwellings that the Netherlands is to build in the next ten years. The result was a revelation. After years of architectural discourse centered on projects well away from the means, it was possible for the first time to get a glimpse of how the vast majority of the Dutch actually live. One of the most remarkable conclusions was that, despite the efforts of architects to make something special, and of occupants to emphasize their individual identity, their sum was simply swamped by the sheer massiveness of the affair. The primary impression made by the exhibition was the uniformity of this landscape—an impression only strengthened by the model of 800,000 houses filling out the entire colonnade of the institute. However, arranged, the fact that they were of equal height left them each time as a kind of steppe, a leveled landscape in which patterns might be made out, yet dominated ultimately by monotony.

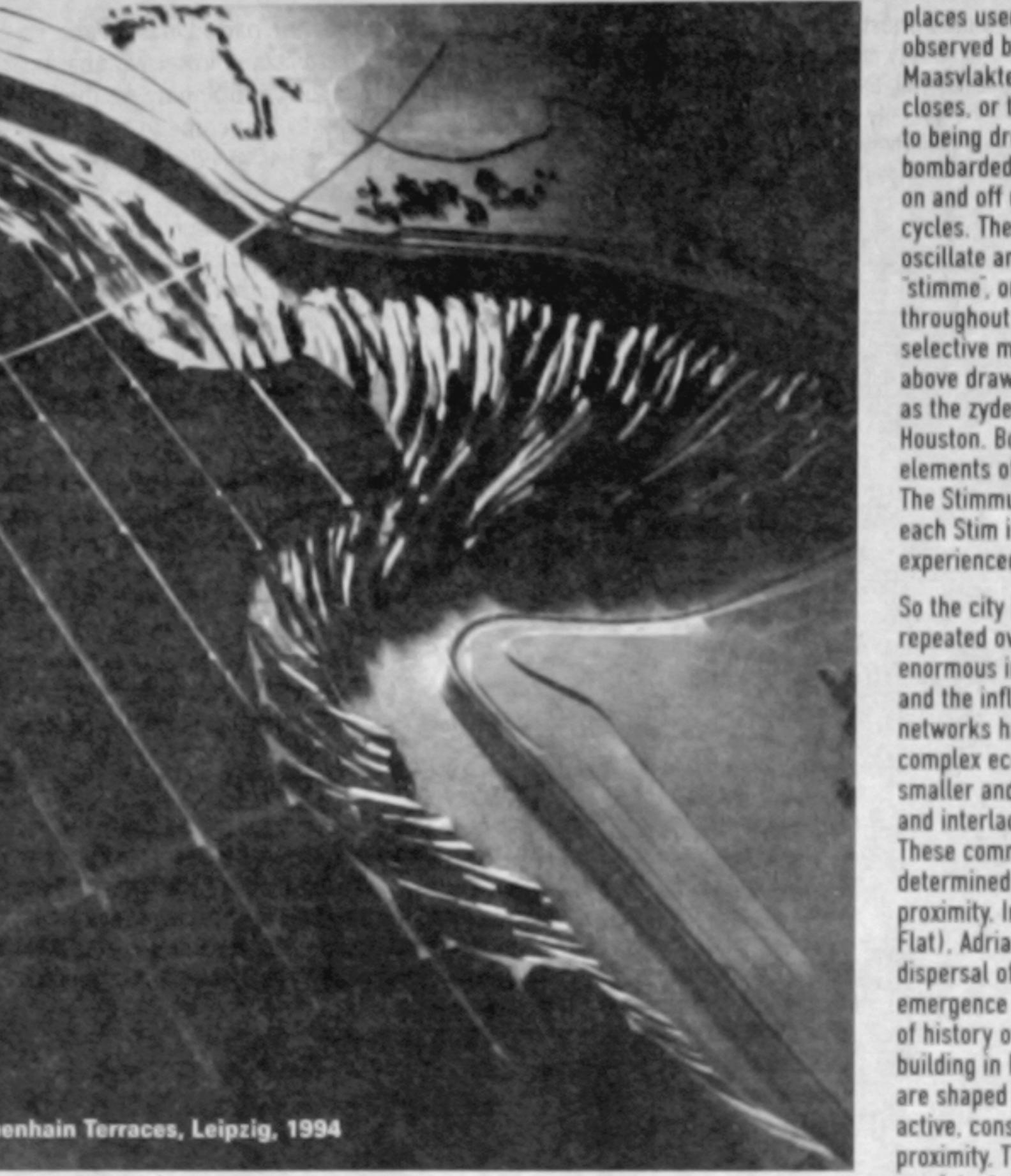
This monotony has been a tricky issue for architects and planners at least since the end of the Sixties, one they have yet to put aside. Given West 8's manner of presentation, it should now be apparent that architects and planners are hardly likely to be the ones to find a solution to this problem. They are by nature all too inclined to split up the issues into chunks and treat them independently, when the cohesion of the landscape as a whole is at stake. The power of several of West 8's larger urban projects lies in the fact that the cohesion of the landscape is resolutely drawn into the design. We see, for instance, the Alexanderpolder project for Architecture International Rotterdam which was presented as part of the Ransdorp as a whole. Again, the large blocks in the proposal for Borneo/Sporenburg anchor the scheme in the broader context of Amsterdam. The extreme density of this scheme, which otherwise consists entirely of low rise, is justified by the argument that the two islands are surrounded by the broad expanse of the IJ-meer, whose waters can then be visually enjoyed by the inhabitants at all times. Finally, the contours of the design for Nieuw Oost near Amsterdam, which deviate radically from the council's proposals, come from the importance of leaving the spatial sequence from Amsterdam via the IJ-meer and IJsselmeer to the North Sea undisturbed. Another major component of the scheme is to reconstruct the old sea wall along the Zuiderze.

The need to view the urbanization process at a larger scale

government subsidy, which has not been the case until now. That means that these new overspill areas, guided by the demands of the housing market, will consist largely of low rise development, thereby turning the traditional relation of city to country in large sectors of the Netherlands forever upside down. The pressure of the market is already so great that it is even beginning to percolate through the fine planning mesh of the sanctified Green Heart of woods and lakes that are at the center of Randstad. The notion that its citizens will finally determine how to run their lives has splintered local administration—witness the division of the large councils into sub-municipalities—while the forming of larger administrative units in anticipation of a European Market of competing regions has been burning for more than fifty years. Hence the horrendous difficulty of drawing up large-scale plans that can transgress municipal boundaries and stand up to the increasing internationalization for which the multinationals and multi-media networks are largely responsible this fraction.

West 8's strength is that they take the themes of this situation and make them the substance of their work. For this, the office may be compared to Rem Koolhaas's Office of Metropolitan Architecture. Both are concerned with, as Koolhaas once said, "maintaining and processing the tradition of so-called 'functionalism': functionalism effectively engaged in a campaign to promote the programmatic thought that architecture could directly influence the contents of a culture rooted in density, technology and social instability."⁶ The design methods of both West 8 and OMA employ a method of "systematic idealizing, a spontaneous overestimation of what is already there, a theoretical bombardment whose retroactive conceptual and ideological intervention extend to even the mediocre."⁷

The clearest and most provocative example of this attitude is undoubtedly the project "In Holland stands a house" which West 8 realized in the Netherlands Architecture Institute. The project was one in a series of exhibitions in which young designers were asked to show their source of inspiration. The organizers had presumably expected West 8 to follow the PoMo tradition and exhibit a poetic assemblage of highlights from the history of landscape architecture or other

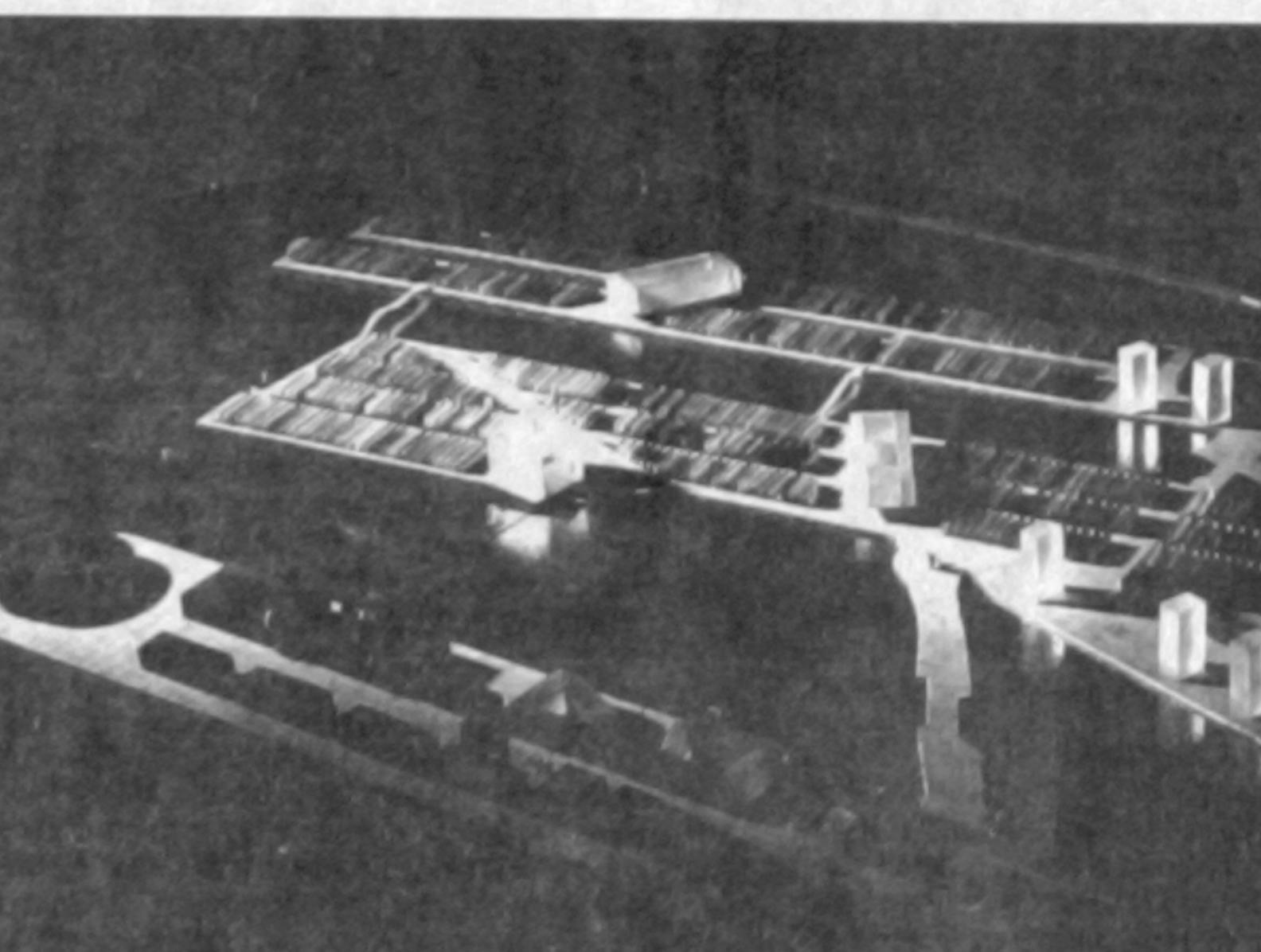


Esenhausen Terraces, Leipzig, 1994

comes from relatively new phenomena: the increase in mobility and the emergence of new media networks. In his introduction to "In Holland stands a house," Adrian Geuze remarks that the appeal of row houses to the urbanite is their lack of pretension. True, it is a mini-universe containing bedroom, kitchen, record player and TV, perhaps supplemented by a nursery, an attic and a small storage cellar—most of all, though, it is "the chosen anonymous" home base for his existence.⁸

In earlier texts, Geuze examines the way the active urbanite lives and, in doing so, dissects a number of fundamental misconceptions: The urbanite is not the pitiful victim of the city who needs looking after and protecting in a discreet, green environment. The urbanite has shown himself to be a self-assured, exploratory individual, highly mobile, and has the technology at his disposal as well as access to numerous media. The environment doesn't need to adapt to the supposed wishes of the urbanite, it is he who adapts to his environment. For him the house is no longer a personal universe. The urbanite is constantly changing guise and environment, taking his leisure on the Maasvlakte and in the Alps, hanging around in dark alleys, tearing through the landscape, sleeping and working at different places, with families and friends that don't live on his street.⁹

So the house and the street are only limited issues from where the urbanite draws his identity; the same holds as much for the neighborhood and the traditional city center as for the things which give him the sense of community. It is ironic that the close of a century is characterized by the most staggering changes in the history of man, and the majority of writings and projects for the city remain haunted by the ghost of the historically obsolete European center-city. The misconception seems that if we return to more or less traditional concepts of city, then the old sense of community would return.¹⁰ The American urbanist Lars Lerup proposes we rethink the city. Like Geuze, he sees the city as an expansive landscape, two of the terms he introduces for it are stum and dross. Stum derives from stimulation as used by William Gibson in his novel, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, from Stumme (voice) and Stummung (ambiance). Dross is a waste product or impurities formed on the surface of molten metal during smelting, but it is also used in the meaning of worthless stuff as opposed to valuable, dreg.¹¹ It is a brilliant metaphor for the city or metropolis as we see it.



Borneo/Sporenburg, Amsterdam, Design 1993—Construction 1995-96

developing worldwide: the idea of life as a bubbling hot metal with a skin which it breaks through at times. Below there is the original landscape of the media, which we might regard as the steam and vapor rising from the molten mass. Needless to say, the lion's share of the built environment is dross. Here we catch an echo of Guy Debord, who in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* writes of the "unification and trivialization of space due to the capitalist mass-production system that shattered all legal and original boundaries, dissipating the independence and quality of place."¹²

In the midst of all this dross are the *suns*. vi

importance to the inhabitants of cities. In the *suns*, Houston, the city Lerup describes, these are the places that are kept cool by a hi-tech infrastructure of air conditioning and refrigeration. These are the places where people start socializing. It can be a bar or a restaurant, a garage with a particular clientele or a shopping mall. It can just as easily be an art party in a chic house, or

places used for the forms of recreation observed by Adrian Geuze on the Maasvlakte. But when the restaurant closes, or the party ends, the stims return to being dross. The Metropolis is bombarded by a million stims that flicker on and off during the city's rhythmic cycles. These stims steam and stir, oscillate and goad, yet each specific "stimmie" or voice, reverberates throughout the Metropolis in a most selective manner, the art party visited above draws a very narrow audience just as the zydeco dance halls in East Houston. The Stimmung, or ambience, projected by each Stim is fully understood and fully experienced by the insiders only.¹³

So the city is not simply the same thing repeated over and over again. The enormous increase in individual mobility and the influence exerted by media networks has made the metropolis a complex ecology in which countless smaller and larger communities coexist and interface with varying compounds. These communities are no longer determined by constant physical proximity. In the story "Onze flat" (Our Flat), Adrian Geuze describes the dispersal of such community and the emergence of many tribes as the basis of history of the Maasvlakte apartment building in Rotterdam.¹⁴ Communities are shaped more and more these days by active, conscious choice and temporal proximity. This extends beyond the persistent, generalized readings of so-called "multi-cultural society" which, no matter how friendly the wording, invariably boils down to an invasion by foreigners. The new mode of forming communities is a phenomenon that transcends borders, and in that sense can be said to develop "from within." These days there are even self-styled "Virtual Communities" on Internet, constituted according to levels of interest ranging from child care to pop groups and from politics to electronic sex; these have no need of place or space, merely an anonymous server.¹⁵

What does this all mean for the public space, the very place for experiencing and celebrating one's sense of community? First it means that there will be less public realm before and that will be consist largely of circulation spaces, whose design is contingent on highways and civil codes. For the specialized public spaces, such as urban squares and plazas, fine form-giving or cultural lining with an art work is not enough for them to be effective. It is the quantity and intensity of the stim, and its offering to us personally that determines, to the exclusion of everything else, that will make us to go into the city. Whether that place is public, semi-public like bars, restaurants, discos and shopping centers, we are assuming ever greater importance to the city. Semi-public networks that have emerged in the larger cities can be used in much the same way as one zaps from channel to channel on TV, intuitively and, with a short interest span, in a constant agitated search for new kicks: "It's cool or it sucks."

West 8's response to this situation is that the more specific public realms are conceived as a program linked to local energy, an energy issuing from the exotic culture defined by the users themselves. Their behavior can hardly be preprogrammed by formal and cultural means, and imposed from above, as they are founded on anarchy, exploration and self-expression. West 8's designs are stages for this anarchy and self-expression. They form the minimal means to an arena that makes its users aware that it is special. New public space will manipulate its users to be aware that it is special. New public space will manipulate its users to the extent that they will immediately be aware of their behavior, and that they can no longer revert to preprogrammed acts, Geuze writes. This space transforms anonymity into exhibitionism, spectators into actors. It is not a matter of design, of the beauty of dimensions, nor materials and colors, but of the sensation of a

space between and behind their investigations, there gradually emerges the picture of a society made of free and active agents who do their own organizing and expression, in new communities. The designs of West 8 not only marry well with this development, the new concept can give these designs a more effective and critical impact at this new level.

Bart Lootsma

Originally published in "Adriaan Geuze" West 8 Landscape Architecture, 1995

1 Adriaan Geuze, "Accelerating Darwin," in Gerrit Smink (ed.), *Nederlandse Landschapshistorie, tussen traditie en experiment*, Amsterdam, 1993.

2 Adriaan Geuze and Anja Guine, *Vormgevingsargumenten voor de nederlandse begravingplaats*, postgraduate research in garden and landscape architecture, Wageningen Agricultural University, 1997.

3 See note 1.

4 Cf. Koos Bosma, *Ruimte voor een nieuwe tijd*, Rotterdam, 1993.

5 Rem Koolhaas, "Unsere 'Neue Sachlichkeit'" in Jacques Lucan, *OMA Rem Koolhaas*, Zurich/Munich 1991.

6 Rem Koolhaas, "Die erschreckende Schönheit des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts," in Jacques Lucan, op. cit.

7 Adriaan Geuze West 8, *In Holland staat een huis*, Rotterdam, 1995.

8 Ibid.

9 Adriaan Geuze, "Wildernis" in Anne-Mie Devolder (ed.) *De Alexanderpolder, waar de stad verder gaat*, Bussum, 1993.

10 Lars Lerup, "Stim and Dross: Rethinking the Metropolis," in *Azembal 25*, 1994.

11 Ibid.

12 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York, 1994.

13 See note 10.

14 Adriaan Geuze, "Onze flat," in *Over Rotterdam*, Rotterdam, 1994 and *Jaarverlag Stimuleringsfonds* 1994, Rotterdam, 1995.

15 Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community, Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Reading (Mass.), 1993.

16 See note 1.

17 Cf. Laudius Ortner, "Amnestie für die gebaut Realität," *Architekt* 1978; see also Bart Lootsma, "Amnestie voor de gebouwde omgeving," in *Architect*, March 1993.

warned us not to go near the park. Duarte Park, Father Demo Square, Charlton Plaza in lower Manhattan, Father Duffy Square in midtown, Verdi Square on the Upper West Side are among parks that come to mind when describing how far nature has receded from our daily life in the City. If indeed, as the American satirical monologist Spalding Gray decreed, Manhattan is an island facing America, that is, a cultural world apart, its attention to public spaces and parks are laden with both specific New York and generic American biases towards land use and leisure time in a capitalist system that allows the design of its environment to supply the desires of the wealth and power structures that dominate.

Looking at our little shabby squares and traffic islands with benches, I wonder what people were thinking when parks were left out of the plans—from the 1811 grid plan with no provisions for parks to silver buildings in the 1980's eclipsing public space. New York is a rare city. Like London or Paris, it is a place that has evolved over centuries revealing its progress to those who come from all over to dwell within it, a place where those leaving are replaced by new inhabitants who patch up or improve what they can rather than moving away. For all its widespread magnetism, New York does not offer that much you can pay for it. The locked gates of the lovely Gramercy Park, a private square accessible only to residents of surrounding high-price real estate are worlds apart from the clamor of Sara Delano Roosevelt Park on the median strip of heavily trafficked avenues on the Lower East Side. Our public parks have become voids in between the arrangement of our buildings. Something we cross through on our way to somewhere else.

With a defining inescapable street life, solitude, isolation, simplicity, conformity are not among New York's attributes and their counterparts can be exhausting as well as exhilarating. Contemporary housing and employment shortages compound the challenges which were exacerbated in the 1970's by widespread cutbacks of mental health facilities and the conversions of single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels that provided inexpensive housing into luxury condominiums, sending thousands onto the streets. While these stresses mount, a common response is to turn away from the public park and retreat to private clubs, gyms, corporate and hotel lobbies. Many parks have become the last resort of those who have no other options.

Left to the financially resource-less and politically under-represented our parks are victims of neglect from the market system they play no role in. There are notable exceptions in the form of individual initiatives (Adam Purple's late-garden on the Lower East Side, Operation GreenThumb and Green Guerrillas community reclamation, the vigilance and thoughtfulness of private non-profits such as The Municipal Art Society, The Central Park Conservancy, Project for Public Spaces, individuals who have led communities including Anthony Dapolito and Jane Jacobs, and provisional allotment gardens that provide options beyond what is dealt with.

In this hand, public spaces have been dealt the cast-offs—the places between buildings, the triangular wedges of raised pavement between avenues, frequently land too insignificant to build on. New York's public spaces are more the resultants of the vicissitudes of the real estate market and political partnerships with developers that the workings of nature, planning, society or art. Public space and park development in this City, with its supposedly free access to all have developed its open spaces alongside the needs of the market economy, complete with ruling class preferences, and top down decisions.

In our history, developers have routinely received concessions. The post-WWII era offered developer-friendly building regulations in exchange for alleged contributions to the public space, neutralizing arts and culture initiatives by allowing them to be co-opted by capital. Incorporating a public plaza, building owners could build bigger—each square foot of plaza gained 10 square feet of office space. Such advantage was taken of this ratio, that between 1961 and 1973, more plaza space was created in New York City than in all other cities combined, while the buildings that towered above them obliterated most of the sunlight they needed to allow plants to grow or invite people to gather. The City fiscal collapse of the 1970's saw legislation even more favorable to developers, deciding rules on a case by case basis. Developers were able to hire the most expensive legal assistance who handily defeated the City's defenders and Community Boards. Plazas and atria built as meager concessions were poorly maintained if ever installed, in perpetual shadow, and rarely truly open to the public. Real losses in public space and the City were sacrificed for imaginary gains. Subsequent conciliatory efforts to beautify streets, or plant trees could not repair the damage done by lack of truly regulatory zoning, land use reform, and putting limits on the impact of private capital.

Besides being objects of the City collection, parks can be and often are much more than static entities. They are sites for social integration, sites where the inevitable forces of the urban environment intersect the unpredictable life forces of humans, the ephemerality of their actions and the altogether different life force of plant matter. The urban landscape is the baseline map of the City's culture, and not just gardens and wilderness, although these are parts of landscape. Society's relationship to its collective environment, where social and public values are communicated is expressed in this landscape.

Physically marginal, the park's place within our Protestant work ethic has and continues to be hard to reconcile. As places where people seemingly sit, relax, think—parks acknowledge the need for play, rest, spontaneity, and as such, are seen as existing for marginal activities between productive pursuits—early morning jogs, weekend walks or lunch hours are tolerated, but are perhaps seen more as nice-to-haves than essentials. Plants and gardens are frequently seen as interlocutors of hobbies, retirees, the spaces of Sunday landscape painting. Other places for nature: as gimmick, sculpted into goofy forms for topical, indoor geometric patterns. As scare tactics: the Eco-fairies or Earth Firsters overly preaching tirades. As marginal, powerless or alternative. The continually threatened work on vacant lots, or the "squatter" status of community groups. The expense of maintaining parks and plantings, like supporting the arts is deemed a luxury, or of serving only a small number, an expense that can be foregone.

designers should acknowledge users and other life forces as integral to their designs and as strong elements to work with. More than that, planning standards and commissions need to view parks as a mandate not an option. With that in mind, New York City can dust off some of the park objects in its collection whose sheen has worn off, and maybe make some new acquisitions.

Nicholas Tobier
April, 1996

when push comes